

POLICE SHOULD CHANGE APPROACH TO USING PROTECTIVE MEASURES TO SAFEGUARD WOMEN AND GIRLS

The police do not always use protective measures effectively to safeguard women and girls, despite evidence of dedicated officers working to protect victims, a new report has found.

A police super-complaint, submitted by the Centre for Women's Justice, raised concerns that the police are failing to use protective measures – such as pre-charge bail with conditions and restraining orders – in cases involving violence against women and girls.

Following a joint investigation, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and the College of Policing found that there were good examples of the police using these measures.

The report said a common theme from police forces where there was good practice was support from a legal team.

However, the report also said there was a lack of understanding within police forces over how and when to use protective measures, which means support for victims is sometimes not good enough – and could lead to women and girls being harmed, or victims being less likely to report crime in the future.

The report made several recommendations, including that:

- Chief Constables should ensure their officers understand all the protective measures available;
- the Home Office and Ministry of Justice should intensify and accelerate their consideration of creating a bespoke offence of breaching pre-charge bail; and
- the Home Office and Ministry of Justice should review and improve the way the police are told about non-molestation orders.

The report concluded that better data collection on the use of protective measures is needed to help the police determine which measures are most effective in different scenarios.

Zoë Billingham, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary said:

“There is an epidemic of crime against women and girls, and protective measures are an important tool for the police to help keep them safe. The police have made vast improvements over the last decade in how they respond to these crimes, but sometimes officers are not aware of the powers available to them, or the processes are confusing – and this could lead to women and girls being harmed.

“Recent changes in legislation will address some of these concerns, but it is essential these changes are communicated to frontline police officers, and that they are given clear guidance to help them understand the law.

“We thank the Centre for Women's Justice for submitting this super-complaint. Ultimately, making sure women and girls are properly protected is not a matter for the police alone. A joined-up approach across the police, government, criminal justice system and victim support organisations is urgently needed so that victims do not fall between the gaps.”

Bernie O'Reilly, Interim Chief Executive Officer of the College of Policing said:

“We are grateful to the Centre for Women’s Justice for bringing forward this super-complaint regarding police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls.

“Protecting vulnerable people and bringing offenders to justice are fundamental responsibilities for the police. The investigation of this super-complaint revealed examples of officers doing great work with both victims and potential victims to ensure the best protection for women and girls, but it is concerning when this was not always the case. It is important that police officers and staff understand the range of protective measures available to help secure the safety of vulnerable women and girls.

“The report also highlights that policing cannot achieve all of the necessary protections for vulnerable people. Other bodies and organisations also have key roles to play. We will continue working with our colleagues across government and policing to take these recommendations forward, ensuring our advice and guidance best equip policing to continue protecting girls and women.”

Michael Lockwood, IOPC Director General said:

“Police have a key role in protecting vulnerable people and this super-complaint has highlighted clear gaps where improvements must be made in protecting vulnerable women and girls.

“The right training, support, guidance and leadership is critical to police using protective measures to help keep women and girls safe from harm.

“However, this is a community-wide issue and one which needs not just a policing response, but a response from the whole criminal justice sector, non-government organisations and others.

“More than ever we need a consistent approach to stopping appalling crimes of violence against women and girls from occurring in the first place.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The super-complaint report *A duty to protect: police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls* will be published on the [HMICFRS website](#) at 00:01 Tuesday 24 August.
- For further information, the HMICFRS Press Office can be contacted at 07836 217 729 or HMICPressOffice@hmicfrs.gov.uk.
- The [police super-complaints system](#) allows designated organisations to raise issues on behalf of the public about harmful patterns or trends in policing.
- This [super-complaint](#) was made by the [Centre for Women’s Justice](#).
- [HMICFRS](#), the [College of Policing](#) and the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) jointly investigated this super-complaint.
- In September, HMICFRS will publish its final report on how the police engage with women and girls. This follows its [interim report](#) last month, which found that radical cross-sector reform to protect women and girls from violent offences is needed immediately.